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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 374th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 21 May 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 6)

Initial report of Cuba (CRC/C/8/Add.30 (English and Spanish only); CRC/C/Q/CUB.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Flórez Prida, Mr. Amat Forés, Ms. de Puzo, Ms. Aliño, Ms. Beretervide and Ms. Hernández Quesada (Cuba) took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the delegation of Cuba and invited it to introduce the initial report of the Cuban Government (CRC/C/8/Add.30).

3. Ms. FLÓREZ PRIDA (Cuba) said that the Cuban National Hero, José Martí, had written that it was necessary to work for children since it was they who sought knowledge and offered hope to the world. Those were the ideas underlying Cuba's permanent commitment to children, who were the most precious treasure humankind possessed.

4. Cuba viewed as an event of particular importance the submission of its initial report to the Committee. The preparation of the report had required a major effort to achieve the necessary coordination involving many different agencies and institutions. On the basis of their particular perspectives and experience, all concerned had made a valuable contribution towards achieving the aim of producing a serious, objective and realistic report showing, not only the many unquestionable successes achieved, but also the major shortcomings and the difficulties encountered. The report had been drawn up in accordance with the guidelines in document CRC/C/58 and the requirements for the submission of initial reports by States parties set out in document HRI/1991/1.

5. However detailed and complete a report might be, it could not always provide a real description of children's rights in a particular country, since life itself and the particular experiences of each country could not be summarized in the space of a few pages or in statistical tables. Through the presence in its delegation of experts from different disciplines, including government and NGO representatives, Cuba hoped to provide the Committee with a more comprehensive picture of its own experience. It also hoped that it would receive valuable guidance from the Committee.

6. Since the World Summit for Children in 1990, and with the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, international interest in the subject of children had increased. The pledges made at the Summit had been encouraging and the aims stated ambitious. However, children could not survive or develop merely on the basis of pledges. Hope must be translated into reality, for which purpose real political will was essential. Cuba attached particular importance to achieving the Summit's objectives and to the implementation of the Convention. Those objectives coincided with the priorities which the country had set itself in its social policy for more than three decades. Many of the targets set at the Summit had in fact already been met. Despite very difficult conditions, the Cuban Government had made great efforts to guarantee free education and health care with universal access for

the whole population, especially for children. That was reflected in the infant mortality statistics (7.9 per 1,000 live births) and in the elimination of diphtheria, poliomyelitis, tetanus in newborn and young children and meningococcal meningitis, among other curable diseases. Furthermore, all children had been given the right to basic education.

7. An enormous task had been undertaken in the face of great difficulties and challenges arising from the situation prevailing in what was a developing country subject to a siege and an economic blockade imposed by its powerful neighbour.

8. In economic terms, Cuba at present faced the most complicated set of circumstances it had known in 35 years. The political and economic transformations which had occurred in the countries with which it traded on a regular basis had produced different kinds of repercussions in terms of the availability of resources for manufacturing, consumption and the generation of foreign currency reserves. Overnight, Cuba had seen its imports reduced by 75 per cent and the almost total loss of its major export markets. The situation had been aggravated by the impact of the economic, commercial and financial blockade unilaterally imposed by the United States for over 35 years. Since 1990 that blockade had been intensified as a result of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts, which had penalized extraterritorial commercial activities and maritime traffic with Cuba. The policy undertaken was one of genocide which aimed to overcome a whole nation by means of hunger and disease, with traumatic effects on the most vulnerable sections of the population including children.

9. The blockade meant that there was less food and fewer medicines on sale to the public. There had been a sharp decline in the availability of school materials, a reduction of macronutrients in people's diets and a serious deterioration in the supply and quality of drinking water. In 1996 alone Cuba had been forced to spend $30 million more than previously on children's medical care, as it had been obliged to purchase necessary products in distant markets. Furthermore, Cuban citizens had no right of access to any medicine patented in the previous 15 years by laboratories in the United States. It was also forbidden to import any kind of medical equipment or instruments of which 20 per cent or more of the components had been manufactured in the United States. The unilateral blockade imposed by that country was thus the main obstacle to achievement of higher objectives and to the full implementation of the Convention.

10. Rarely had a nation been subjected to such an ordeal. Only the fairness of its social programmes, the capacity for resistance of its people and policies based on broad popular consensus had enabled Cuba to dispel the fateful omens and to survive thus far. However, despite a 34.8 per cent decrease in GDP in 1993, a positive and encouraging balance had been realized in 1996, reflected in a GDP growth of 7.8 per cent. That had helped to strengthen the gradual recovery initiated in 1994. If Cuba continued to resist and its recovery continued, it was not difficult to imagine the opportunities that would present themselves and the sufferings its people would be spared in the absence of the obstacles currently imposed by the blockade.

11. It was necessary to update some of the most important child-care indicators contained in the report, which had been submitted in 1995. All Cuban citizens now had access to free health-care services. At the end of 1997, there would be 1 doctor for every 178 inhabitants and 1 dentist for every 1,150 inhabitants. The infant mortality rate was 7.9 per 1,000 live births, which placed Cuba, a poor country subject to an economic blockade, among the countries with the lowest rates. An assistance network reached the most remote parts of the country and enabled 99.9 per cent of pregnant women to give birth in maternity homes and, on average, to receive about 12 prenatal checkups during their period of pregnancy. Cuban children had been vaccinated against 11 preventable diseases. Access to education at all levels was free. There was no illiteracy, the school attendance ratio up to the age of 12 was very high and there was 1 teacher for every 42 inhabitants. The national education system had 2.2 million pupils at all levels of instruction and there were over 10,000 preschool, primary and intermediate level education centres, as well as 45 higher education institutes. Education's share of the State's total expenditure budget was 13.5 per cent, a very high figure for a small country with a population of just over 11 million inhabitants.

12. According to ILO data, 200 million children under the age of 13 throughout the world were obliged to work to stay alive. That was not the case, however, of any Cuban children. A similar number throughout the world slept in the streets. More than a million children were forced into child prostitution and tens of thousands were victims of the cruel trade in bodily organs. Each day throughout the world 25,000 children died of measles, malaria, diphtheria, pneumonia and malnutrition. None of the children in those categories was Cuban. During the last 10 years some 2 million children had died in armed conflicts and three times as many had been seriously injured or mutilated. Once again none of them was Cuban. It was against such forms of evil and injustice that the Cuban Government was committed to fighting.

13. Ms. SARDENBERG commended the Cuban Government for the interest it had shown in engaging in dialogue on children's rights, an interest that was shared by the Committee. The updated statistics provided by the Cuban delegation were important, as were the responses given to the questions raised by the Committee. Cuba had shown great determination in pursuing public policies to protect children, as was emphasized in paragraph 4 of its report. The production of the latter was the result of a process of consultation, which was a positive factor. However, it would be useful to have more details, not only in order to understand the results achieved but also to know how the report had been drafted.

14. Referring to the requirement in article 42 of the Convention that its principles and provisions be widely publicized, she asked whether the Cuban Government intended to distribute the report and subsequently to organize some kind of event that would enable the public to become aware of the Committee's reaction to it. In the light of the guidelines furnished by the Committee, she was disappointed that the general measures of implementation had not been more clearly highlighted in Cuba's report. A general idea had been given but it was important to clarify which administrative structures and authorities within government were responsible for such measures.

15. Ms. KARP said that the dedication shown and the successes achieved by the Cuban Government were impressive. However, if the structures used to implement the Convention were to be fully understood, certain questions remained to be answered. More details were needed on the national or local mechanisms used to ensure that the Convention was implemented and to coordinate and monitor action taken. The progress made was assessed on an annual basis, but how were the relevant statistics and information gathered?

16. In the written responses provided by Cuba, it was stated that a number of laws had been harmonized for the purposes of implementation of the Convention, but it would be useful to have some concrete examples of how the new legislation operated in practice. It had been stated that Cuba's labour law had been amended in 1977 to meet the requirements of the ILO Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention. More details on that subject would be welcome. The question of the age of marriage had also been discussed in the report, but what was the effect of the new legislation on such issues as non-discrimination based on gender? Had the Convention on the Rights of the Child been brought to the attention of the courts? Had decisions interpreting the Convention been taken? Finally, in relation to the publicizing of the Convention among adults, as distinct from relevant instruction in schools, it had not been made clear how public awareness of the Convention had been developed, particularly with reference to the specific new ideologies regarding the participation of children.

17. Mr. FULCI noted that the economic crisis that had prevailed in Cuba since 1989, referred to as the "special peacetime period", had led to severe shortages and rationing and to a decline in expenditure on education and health. Yet Cuba had pledged, in paragraph 5 of its report (CRC/C/8/Add.30), to continue implementing the Convention despite those adverse circumstances. How had it set about fulfilling that pledge and how severely had the crisis affected previous programmes for child survival and development and maternal health? As the data in the report covered the period up to 1994, he requested some child welfare indicators such as the infant mortality ratio, vaccination coverage and school enrolment for the most recent period.

18. Mr. KOLOSOV asked whether there were structures for monitoring cases of violation of children's rights and what remedies were available.

19. Were children in Cuba genuinely aware of the existence of the Convention and of children's rights and, if so, what action were they taking to assert those rights?

20. Mr. RABAH expressed surprise that, according to the delegation, there were no homeless children, street children or children involved in prostitution in Cuba. He wished to know what steps were taken by the juvenile justice system to rehabilitate children who had been in conflict with the law and what was the role of non-governmental organizations in the various areas covered by the report?

21. Referring to paragraph 61 of the report, he asked who were the children taken from their parents and placed in official children's institutions. He would also like to know what machinery existed to ensure compliance with the legislation prohibiting child labour?

22. Ms. MOKHUANE inquired about the terms of reference and powers of any structures involved in the monitoring of violations of children's rights.

23. She was concerned that Cuba's child and other mortality rates seemed to be increasing despite the many policies in place to cushion the impact of the economic crisis and she would welcome further information concerning welfare facilities for pregnant women and their children.

24. Ms. FLÓREZ PRIDA (Cuba) noted that her country's written reply to the Committee's list of issues (CRC/C/Q/CUB.1), which had been circulated to the members of the Committee, contained updated information concerning, in particular, the child mortality ratio, which had declined from 9.9 per 1,000 at the time of compilation of the report to 7.4 per 1,000 at the end of 1996.

25. The report had been prepared on the basis of an interdisciplinary approach involving, inter alia, the Ministries of Labour, Public Health and Education, social welfare bodies and non-governmental organizations such as the Federation of Cuban Women.

26. Following the World Summit for Children, Cuba had introduced a National Action Programme for Children with subsidiary programmes in the 14 provinces and the special municipality. She would furnish members of the Committee with copies of Cuba's Fifth Report on Follow-up and Evaluation of the World Summit. With the help of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), her country had published a booklet entitled Children and their Rights, which contained the text of the Convention, a review of the background to its adoption and an explanation of its provisions. The booklet had been distributed widely and formed part of the school civics course. The mass media, in cooperation with UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), had also publicized the Convention and its content.

27. The following domestic legislation was of immediate relevance to the Convention: Law No. 1289 of 1975 (the Family Code); the Constitution of 1976; Law No. 16 of 1978 (the Children's Code); Decree-Law No. 64 of 1982 concerning juvenile welfare; Law No. 87 on civil status; Decree-Law No. 95 concerning the prevention and social welfare commissions; Law No. 62 of 1989 (the Penal Code); Law No. 90 of 1970 concerning the people's courts; Decree-Law No. 132 of 1992 concerning local labour law entities; the 1992 Law on Constitutional Reform and the 1994 amendments to the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

28. Ms. ALIÑO (Cuba) said that the economic blockade had certainly affected Cuba's health programmes. The figures for 1996 were the best ever recorded, but the Cuban people had had to make tremendous sacrifices to mobilize the resources needed to purchase, for example, drugs, vaccines and medical equipment. With the assistance of UNICEF and other international organizations, record low figures had been achieved for the child mortality ratio (7.4), the index of low birth-weight (7.3) and the maternal mortality ratio (2.35 per 10,000 births). The Ministry of Health kept a close watch on the volume of resources available for the Mother and Child Programme, regularly monitoring the reserves available for each project.

29. Ms. de PUZO (Cuba) said that the concerns addressed by the Convention had been studied and legislated for in Cuba long before the drafting of that instrument. As Cuban national policy had already been formulated with a view to guaranteeing children's rights and as the corresponding institutional structures existed, it had proved unnecessary to set up a specific body for the purpose of implementing the Convention.

30. Cuba had ratified a number of ILO conventions directed against child labour, the most recent and comprehensive of which was Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. She assured the Committee that child labour did not exist in any form in Cuba.

31. The amended Family Code was currently before the National Assembly for adoption. One of the questions being discussed in that connection was equality for girls and boys in terms of the age of marriage.

32. The courts themselves did not apply international human rights treaties directly, but the provisions of every such instrument ratified by Cuba were reflected in the country's domestic legislation and thus automatically taken into account by the courts.

33. There was basically no problem of child abuse in Cuban families and hence no demand for medical attention for children who had suffered physical assault or mental ill-treatment. When the family unit fell apart, the Family Code required both parents to continue exercising paternal authority. Although one parent was granted custody, usually but not always the mother because of her closer emotional relationship with the children, steps were taken to ensure that both parents were involved in the children's upbringing.

34. Ms. FLÓREZ PRIDA (Cuba) said that 13.6 per cent of Cuba's budget was devoted to education (with primary education accounting for about 23.2 per cent of the education budget), 11.7 per cent to health and 17.2 per cent to social security. Health and education indicators were available for the different provinces and their distinctive characteristics and needs could therefore be taken into account.

35. In 1993, during the "special peacetime period", Cuba's gross national product had recorded a decline of 35 per cent compared with the 1990 level. The education budget, however, had declined by no more than 22 per cent, even at its lowest point in 1995, and had recovered in 1996 and 1997 by 3.5 per cent and 8.9 per cent respectively. No school or hospital had been closed. The statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO) bore out that achievement. Cuba had already achieved or in some cases exceeded the targets set under the Global Strategy for Health for All for the Year 2000.

36. Ms. BERETERVIDE (Cuba) drew attention to paragraph 64 of the report which described the action taken by the State on behalf of children left without family protection, particularly through Decree-Law No. 76 of 1984 which had set up a network of social welfare centres and children's hostels for orphaned or abandoned children. Paragraphs 65 to 67 went on to describe the systems of adoption and fosterage.

37. Special education facilities at the primary and secondary levels were provided for children with physical or mental disabilities and for socially disadvantaged minors belonging to high-risk groups. A good example of the participatory activities of children and young people, and of the ways in which their opinions were taken into account, was the José Martí Pioneers' Organization, which held congresses every five years that were attended by children from first to ninth grades; young people had even secured modification of their school curriculum through the participation of Pioneer groups in the collective management of schools. Further information on that subject was given in the delegation's written reply to question 17 of the Committee's list of issues. Close ties existed in Cuba between young people's organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the latter worked closely with State organizations to ensure that the needs and opinions of the young people's parents were also understood and reflected properly.

38. A distinction had to be made between abandoned children and children who had been forced into prostitution as the only way of surviving. At no point had the delegation stated that there was no child prostitution in Cuba: the development of the tourism sector had certainly contributed to that phenomenon, but it was not a large-scale activity involving children with no other means of support. Adults brought before the courts for involvement in child prostitution had received harsh sentences: the Penal Code provided for from 8 to 20 years' imprisonment, and in particularly serious cases, capital punishment. A great deal was done to try to prevent the spread of child prostitution, with the involvement of committees, State bodies and non-governmental organizations at grass-roots level in the communities. Families in which cases of child prostitution had occurred and those in which there was a danger of cases occurring were monitored closely. Even before the revolution it had been recognized that there was not enough provision in Cuban legislation for children and young people, and their protection had been extended by the Youth Code and the Family Code.

39. A great deal had been achieved in the past 37 years for children and young people but much still remained to be done. Health care and education were provided free of charge, which was exceptional among the countries of the Caribbean region, but it was important to monitor the situation closely and ensure that children and young people continued to be protected by the law.

40. The CHAIRPERSON, observing that Cuba's written replies to the Committee's list of issues (CRC/C/Q/CUB.1) had been received late and that Committee members had therefore not been able to give them the consideration they would have wished, acknowledged that Cuba had done a great deal to meet its obligations under the Convention. The report had stated that the institutional arrangements and systems were working well, and that there was no need for further mechanisms. However, even in the best systems there were children who were not properly catered for and although there was a high level of participation among children in Cuba she asked what mechanisms existed for them to make their own complaints, and whether there were any guarantees that those complaints would be heeded. Her concern in that respect was particularly for those children who were outside the child welfare and care system and needed to lodge complaints.

41. Ms. KARP said that her question regarding legislation had perhaps been misunderstood: she had been alluding to the Convention as a reference document. It was all very well to state that the Convention, having been ratified, formed part of domestic legislation but if the suggestion was that the rights of the child were thereby adequately served without the need to publicize the Convention itself it was to miss the point that the Convention adopted a holistic view of the rights of the child, regarding them not only as the rights to education and health care but as the right to the possession of human rights. The holistic approach was a characteristic feature of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in that respect it differed from other human rights conventions. She asked precisely what was the status of the Convention itself in Cuba.

42. Ms. SARDENBERG said that the Committee did not expect all countries to have a specific type of mechanism for guaranteeing children's rights. However, her concern with regard to Cuba was that the benefit of what appeared to be an integrated approach involving various government ministries might be lost if the work was broken down and subdivided among them. She wanted to know how the ministries coordinated their action in order to ensure that it reflected the thrust of the Convention, which dealt with the child as a whole. She had been impressed by the work done under Cuba's National Action Programme for Children to implement the agreements reached at the World Summit for Children and she wanted to know how it reflected the relevant legislation.

43. Much had been done in Cuba in the areas of follow-up and evaluation, and she wondered if it would be possible to incorporate in the National Action Programme the other matters dealt with in the Convention, thereby recognizing that instrument's holistic approach to the rights of the child. Reference had been made to the adoption of a Children's Code, following the ratification of the Convention. She wished to know on what date the Code had come into force and what was its relationship with the Convention. She also asked what mechanism existed in Cuba for gathering statistical data, how reliable it was and what relationship there was between the results reflected in the data collected and any adjustments made to social and political policies in order to meet the needs of children. The inclusion of the Convention in school curricula was a positive development and she wondered how long it had been taught, how the teachers themselves were taught to teach it, and what training was provided for national groups working with children. With regard to international cooperation, it had been stated in Cuba's written reply to question 9 of the Committee's list of issues that grants and soft loans received by Cuba in 1996 had amounted to an estimated US$ 100 million, most of which had been used to support the social sectors and humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups. She would like to have some particulars of the vulnerable groups, and to learn what social sectors were involved and what in future would be the priority areas for allocation of international funds made available to Cuba.

44. Mr. KOLOSOV said that it was unrealistic to suggest that there were no cases in Cuba of complaints by children of physical punishment or abuse in the family or elsewhere. Either the monitoring system was faulty or the children did not know their rights. In the case, for example, of a child abandoned by his or her alcohol-dependent parents, it was virtually certain that those parents had used physical methods of disciplining the child. Before children

became juvenile offenders in conflict with the law they must have suffered certain kinds of abuse of their rights, and that was why he had asked about remedies and prevention mechanisms. His question as to whether it was possible for a child to lodge a complaint had been answered in general terms, but he would like to be given the detail of one or two specific cases as an illustration.

45. The José Martí Pioneers' Organization was an important structure which contributed much to the education and leisure activities of children in Cuba. It was clear, moreover, that Cuban children participated in disseminating knowledge about the Convention and about their own rights. In some countries, competitions and games were organized for children and by children, often through the mass media, in relation to the rights of the child and the Convention; children also took part in youth courts, children's parliaments and children's municipal councils. He asked the delegation for specific information on what participatory activities Cuban children and young people engaged in regarding their rights and the Convention.

46. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked how Cuba ensured national coordination in the implementation of the National Action Programme for Children and the Convention so that the situation could be adequately monitored. It had been stated that in Cuba minors did not work, but what provisions existed for dealing with any case in which child labour was detected? In view of the country's economic situation children might find themselves having to work in the informal sector. It had been admitted that child prostitution existed and when cases were detected any adult involved was severely punished, but what happened to the child victim, whose dignity, self-respect and state of mind had been damaged? Was education mandatory for all children, if so from what age and what measures were taken in the event of non-attendance? What measures were being taken to reduce the number of abandoned children? When young people engaged in productive work, did they do so in their area of study, did they choose the work freely or was it imposed upon them? Was agriculture an area in which all children had to work, or was it only for those being trained or educated in the agricultural sector? Was there productive work for young people in other areas and was military service compulsory?

47. Mr. RABAH asked, in relation to the statement that adults involved in child prostitution in Cuba were non-Cubans, what measures were taken to deal with them. Were they expelled from the country?

48. Mr. FULCI said it was laid down in article 51 of Cuba's Constitution that everybody had a right to education, and even the Cuban Government's fiercest opponents admitted that education in the country was free and that enrolment rates were very high. It had been stated that education in Cuba was mandatory up to the sixth grade, but what did the sixth grade represent in the Cuban system? What was the age of children in the sixth grade? He also requested justification of the statement that the problems of street children and child labour did not exist. A report by the United States Department of State on human rights practices in Cuba, published in 1997, stated that all students over the age of 11 were expected to devote 30 to 45 days of their summer vacation to farm work, labouring up to 8 hours a day. The Cuban Ministry of Agriculture also used voluntary labour by student work brigades.

The report (para. 104) confirmed that practice when it stated that work was conceived as part of the curriculum in school and university. As a student before the Second World War he himself had been required to do farm work, and he recalled that it had not been popular. He asked how long the summer vacation was for school and university students, and how long they had to work in agriculture. He also asked how the practice related to article 32 of the Convention which confirmed the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation, and to article 31 which confirmed the right of the child to rest and leisure.

49. As for the sexual exploitation of children, upon which the Government's report had been silent, it had been stated in Cuba's report of 1996 to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that the problem very much affected girls aged 14 and 15, who engaged in prostitution to support their families, although most did so simply because they desired extra income, consumer goods or access to places Cubans were not normally able to visit. The phenomenon was apparently evident in tourist areas, and he requested any specific information the delegation might have on the size of the problem, how long ago it had begun to appear and whether it was increasing or decreasing. He also asked what was done to warn the girls and their families of what might happen to them if they engaged in such activities.

50. Ms. FLÓREZ PRIDA (Cuba) said that it would be useful if Mr. Fulci could indicate to her delegation the source of his information, which would enable the Government to provide an adequate reply. The members of the Committee had perhaps misunderstood some of Cuba's replies and an effort would be made to provide clarifications. In the view of Cuba, the World Summit for Children, its Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, and the Convention were inextricably linked, since they all concerned the well-being of children. Only a week before, Cuba had participated in talks with Canada concerning the manner in which the Convention was implemented in those two countries, a fruitful exchange which the Government intended to repeat vis-à-vis other countries.

51. Mr. AMAT FORÉS (Cuba) said that he would reply to the legal questions that had been raised. It should firstly be noted that a set of laws concerned with the protection of children were in effect; some of which predated Cuba's ratification of the Convention. In Cuba, as in many other countries, international legal instruments were not necessarily written into domestic law, but instead represented a set of general principles. In Cuba, it fell to the National Assembly of People's Power to see to the implementation of the Convention. Under the auspices of that body, various commissions worked on the development of legislation in all areas, including that of children. Those commissions began by analysing the international legal instruments to which Cuba was a party, with a view to incorporating their terms in legislation. The ministries, and in particular the Ministry of Justice, were also empowered to develop and initiate legislation. Furthermore, a mechanism existed whereby the various ministries tested the implementation and effectiveness of legislation in their areas of concern. By way of example, the Ministry of Justice collected information from the courts in order to identify any legal or procedural flaws or shortcomings. Even more importantly, the Cuban system of democratic participation provided for

community assemblies in which housewives, workers and students could air their views, bringing to light problems with existing legislation. It was essential to understand the active relationship that existed between Cuban Government and society.

52. A commission had recently been refining the Family Code and the Children's Code was also being reviewed.

53. The Ministry of Education was responsible for incorporating the Convention's concepts and principles in the educational system, with a view to instilling those values into the character and world view of Cuban youth. Cuba wished its young people to be upstanding, unselfish, active participants in society.

54. Cuba also endeavored to assimilate the findings of the various relevant international conferences into its national legislation and had in fact been among the first countries to introduce the Habitat agreements into domestic law.

55. The question had been raised how Cuba's ministries coordinated their different efforts in order to resolve any single problem relating to children. The Cuban system of Government provided for several vice-presidents who coordinated the work of the different ministries; they had the power to convene meetings of the relevant ministers and institutions, which then debated the issue in question and developed general directives. The Ministries concerned then had to oversee the implementation of the directives through the governmental inspection system. Meetings were held periodically at which progress was reported.

56. A commission for social prevention and care, involving both governmental and non-governmental organizations, had been established to study the prevention of problems affecting not only children but also the broader society. Among the issues it had addressed were various matters currently under discussion, such as prostitution, sexual abuse, and the provision of information to women concerning the rights of the child.

57. For the development of its legislation, the Cuban Government collected data by means of surveys and other usual statistical methods.

58. Although Cuban parents had of course sometimes been prosecuted for inflicting corporal punishment on their children, that was not a widespread problem. Nor were street children or child prostitution phenomena of significant scope. It was perhaps the case that, with the recent rise in tourism, certain individuals had come to Cuba seeking young girls; Cuban law strongly proscribed such activities. The Cuban Criminal Code proscribed, inter alia, the abandonment of handicapped children, infringement of the personal liberty of a child and action hampering the normal development of a child, and it established criminal penalties for those offences. It also established the responsibilities of parents, teachers, and others. Children were sometimes removed from their family, when the latter constituted an adverse influence, and placed in institutions which provided them with care and education as well as leisure and sports opportunities. There should be no doubt of Cuba's commitment to the protection and development of its children.

59. Ms. FLÓREZ PRIDA (Cuba) said that following the Fourth World Conference on Women, Cuba had conducted a national seminar to study the recommendations put forward in the Conference's Platform for Action; that seminar had undertaken to analyse the role of women in all spheres of Cuban economic and social life, and had drawn up recommendations, which had then been forwarded to all sectors of the Government.

60. The provisions of the Convention had been integrated into civic education curricula and there were courses in which students studied the Convention as well as its implementation in Cuba. With support from UNICEF, teaching materials were being prepared to familiarize children with the Convention. Importantly, the perceptions and experiences of students were considered an integral facet of the pedagogical approach. At the primary and secondary school levels, course work included issues of human rights and democracy, the family as a social institution, and Cuban patriotism and internationalism. Through debate, students discovered the ways in which society enabled its members to meet not only basic material needs but also cultural and spiritual needs. The situation of human rights worldwide was also discussed.

61. Cuba's schoolchildren learned about human rights and democracy primarily through active participation in the life of the country. Work training programmes had been developed, in which students engaged in socially useful work in school workshops, community businesses, farms and gardens, commencing at the preschool level. Such work-study methods allowed for children to interact with members of the community and to cultivate the appropriate values and sentiments. At the preschool and primary school levels, children took part in socially useful activities alongside their teachers, participated in role-playing exercises, and either visited work sites, or received visits from worker delegations. Work by students was considered a means of stimulating the work ethic and inculcating good work habits.

62. Basic education in Cuba was divided into three levels. During the first cycle of primary education, or the first four grades, emphasis was placed on the development of manual skills and work habits through the use of paper, cardboard, cloth, and other materials. During the second cycle, students worked with cloth, wood, metal and plastics, and learned basic cooking skills. They also worked on short-term collective farm projects, as well as in school market gardens.

63. At the middle level, schools were designated as either rural or urban. They shared the same curriculum, which included both work education and participation in productive work. In the seventh grade, students learned general design and handicrafts; in higher grades, they developed and pursued educational objectives through elective programmes and participated in work programmes called "the school in the country" and "the school on the farm".

64. Under the "school on the farm" programme, the school moved to a camp in a farm area for a period of from four to seven weeks during which students did farm work; the nature of the work day depended on a student's age, sex and ability. Under the "school in the country" programme, students participated in the cultivation of citrus and other fruits, coffee, tobacco, and vegetables.

65. Such school programmes had been designed to resolve social problems and to improve social productivity. The work-study system was meant as a means, not of exploiting student labour, but rather of training young people for productive participation in society. Such measures were of crucial importance in a developing country. Students had two months of vacation every year, during which they were free to do as they pleased and go where they pleased. The normal minimum working age in Cuba was 17; children under that age were permitted to work only under certain circumstances regulated by law, and under conditions that accorded with their age and capacities.

66. Education and health were Cuba's two chief priorities, and both were free.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.